Fritz Stern at 70

edited by
Marion F. Deshmukh
Jerry Z. Muller

GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE
WASHINGTON D.C.
FRITZ STERN AT 70

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Jerry Z. Muller
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Preface

On April 26, 1996, a conference was held at the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C., to honor Professor Fritz Stern on the occasion of his seventieth birthday. This volume is an outgrowth of that conference. It includes the formal papers and informal memoirs that were presented, as well as additional information about Professor Stern's scholarly career.

Fritz Stern is not only the author of two historical masterpieces, *The Politics of Cultural Despair* and *Gold and Iron*; for four decades, his edited volume *The Varieties of History* has introduced students to the study of history. His lectures have inspired generations of undergraduates, and his seminars have produced scores of doctoral students. He has contributed incisively to the public understanding of contemporary history in Germany and the United States and has helped knit together the once-frayed contacts between Germans and Americans. Furthermore, he has taken an active role in a host of organizations, including the Council on Foreign Relations and the American Council on Germany.

Because Fritz Stern has been not only a scholar of distinction but a citizen active in public affairs, the organizers decided that a traditional academic conference comprised of research papers by his students and colleagues would fail to capture the man to whom we wanted to pay tribute. Therefore, instead of arranging a scholarly conference *in honor of* Fritz Stern, we tried to put together a program that was *about* Fritz Stern and would call attention to the range of his activities.

The symposium began with an afternoon session in which some of the main themes of Fritz Stern's scholarship were explored by three historians particularly well suited to the task by virtue of their areas of expertise. Their papers are included in this volume, as are the introductory remarks by Detlef Junker, Jackson Janes, and Marion Deshmukh.
While the afternoon session focused on Fritz Stern’s historical works, the speeches offered at the evening banquet were intended to focus on aspects of Fritz Stern’s life. The contributors were chosen from an array of men and women who have known him, worked with him, and profited from his company over the years. Stern’s doctoral advisor, Jacques Barzun, and his colleague, David Landes, offered some remembrances of things past, which were read at the banquet and appear here in print. The remarks delivered by Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, publisher of *Die Zeit*, appeared in that journal and are reprinted here. We have also included the contributions of her copublisher, former Bundeskanzler Helmut Schmidt, and Jay Winter, Stern’s former undergraduate student at Columbia who is now a university lecturer in history at Cambridge University. Winter’s poem is about Fritz Stern at Sils Maria.

Reminiscences were also offered by Ralf Dahrendorf (Baron Dahrendorf of Clare Market in the City of Westminster), Warden of Nuffield College, Oxford; and by Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke, former U.S. Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany and Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs. Lord Dahrendorf recalled his encounters with Fritz Stern, first when both were fellows at the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences at Palo Alto in 1957–58, and then when Dahrendorf visited Columbia in the 1960s. Meeting Fritz Stern was particularly significant for him, Dahrendorf recalled, because Stern was among those who exemplified the Western commitment to “civility,” which Dahrendorf found lacking in his native land; and, through Stern, Dahrendorf was exposed to a Western historical perspective. He commented also on Fritz Stern’s ongoing concern for Columbia University and on the importance of faculty members committed to the institution in helping the university weather the storm of student protest in the late 1960s.

Ambassador Holbrooke began by noting Stern’s contribution to his own political education and focused on Stern’s role at the American embassy in Bonn, where he served as Holbrooke’s senior advisor from October 1993 through January 1994. The ambassador remarked upon the extraordinary esteem in which Stern is held by German political figures and in the German media. He also commented on Stern’s ability to remind the Germans about the darkest
portions of their past while emphasizing the need for Americans and Jews to reconcile with Germany. Members of the audience offered briefer reminiscences of their own.

The conference was sponsored by three organizations in which Fritz Stern has played an active role: the German Historical Institute, the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, and the German Marshall Fund of the United States. We are grateful to Detlef Junker, director of the German Historical Institute, and to Jackson Janes, executive director of the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, for their aid in arranging the conference as well as the publication of this volume. Above all, of course, we are grateful to Fritz Stern for his guidance, his example, his friendship, and certainly not least, his books.

Marion F. Deshmukh
Jerry Z. Muller
Introductory Remarks
Marion Deshmukh

Seated in front row: Kenneth Barkin, David Sorkin, Jackson Janes, Detlef Junker
Professor Stern, Ambassador Chrobog,
Former Students, Friends, and Associates
of Fritz Stern from the United States and Europe,
Dear Colleagues from Washington,
Dear Fellows of the Institute:

We have gathered together to honor you, dear Professor Stern, on the occasion of your seventieth birthday. We would like to pay tribute to your scholarship and its influence, to your intellectual and political eminence on both sides of the Atlantic. We are certain that future generations will join our own contemporaries in the following united assessment: You are a great historian and have contributed immensely to our understanding of Germany in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The German Historical Institute is thankful and proud that, when thinking about an appropriate setting in which to honor you, your former students sought out our Institute. If this building and this hall had not already existed, they surely would have had to be created for the symposium, "Fritz Stern: An Appreciation."

When you look around at the photographs on the walls, you immediately recognize that this room—as well as the Felix Gilbert Reading Room downstairs—are dedicated to German historians who fled Nazi Germany and emigrated to this country. This generation of scholars, which to a large extent had completed its training in Germany, and the succeeding one—that is, your generation, which had to leave Germany as young people—you have indeed yourself honored with the following words: "When defeated Germany turned into a monstrous tyranny, we became the guardians of German history; from 1933 to 1945, German history was being written here and in England or not at all." And: "The Second World War and America's postwar role of Western leadership fashioned a younger generation of American historians who were at home in Europe and its intellectual life and some of whom contributed important, original interpretations of the German problem."

Your fate as an emigrant underscores the age-old insight that, since the time of Thucydides, it has always been the latest catastrophe or the latest great transformation that has inspired historians, philosophers, and other interpreters of world history to search for
new insights. The French Revolution, you once wrote, was as real in Hegel's writing as was the sacking of Rome in St. Augustine's City of God. I think it is fair to say that what is real in this sense in the works of Fritz Stern is National Socialism and the "Third Reich." Certainly, it was that formative personal experience that compelled you to study German and European history.

The most important objective of the German Historical Institute in Washington, D.C., is to foster scholarly discussion and the exchange of ideas between American and European, especially German, historians. For more than forty years, you have dedicated yourself with enthusiasm, diligence, and attentiveness to this goal as the author of monographs that have become standard works, as a focal point of meetings and conferences, as a speaker and guest professor the world over, and as a host and personal friend.

History is an ever-changing, self-renewing discipline. For its part, the German Historical Institute tries to promote a transatlantic dialogue through a continuous exchange of research fellows, guest researchers, and the strong support of young scholars. The assembly of many of your former students, who have gone on to become prominent scholars, is testimony to your own highly successful contribution to the continuous renewal of historical scholarship.

From your writings, activities, and public lectures, all of the scholars at the Institute might learn from your example of how to balance the existential and inherent tensions in the life of a historian; namely, the demands to strive toward scholarly independence and objectivity, on the one hand, with the political passion for freedom and humanity, on the other. Professor Stern, you were a virtual historical institute long before this organization was established in 1987. Accordingly, this building is a happy choice for this symposium.

The German Historical Institute would like to thank everyone who has made this event possible. Your former students, Professors Marion Deshmukh and Jerry Muller, who took the initiative; Jackson Janes from the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies and Craig Kennedy from the German Marshall Fund of the United States, who gladly and generously agreed to support this symposium and celebration; Professors David Sorkin and Kenneth Barkin, who, along with Professor Muller, volunteered their scholarly expertise.
Last but not least, I would like to thank our guests from the worlds of politics and journalism: Senator Bradley, Lord Dahrendorf, Countess Dönhoff, and Ambassador Holbrooke—all of whom wanted to share with us the pleasure of this event and their reminiscences of Fritz Stern. Finally, I would like to thank your former students, who embody a remarkable confirmation of the old truism: A good teacher, through his students, ultimately achieves immortality.

Detlef Junker
Director,
German Historical Institute
Ambassador Chroboz,  
Professor and Mrs. Stern,  
Colleagues, Friends, and Guests:

It is a great honor for the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies to have cosponsored this event. We are among the many who share feelings of great gratitude toward Fritz Stern. Since its inception over a decade ago, the mission of AICGS has been and remains to be to help nurture a new generation of scholars in the United States who are focused on Germany and to help deepen American understanding of contemporary German affairs. In other words, we set out to follow in Fritz Stern's footsteps. For he has been accomplishing this dual mission throughout his illustrious career.

As a historian, Fritz Stern asks the historian's question: How did certain things come about? All historians aspire to provide us with more than a chronicle. But as H. Stuart Hughes once said, the discovery of the spirit of the times is the historian's highest achievement. Professor Stern has enriched enormously our ability to understand Germany's spirit of the times, when those times were dark and tragic, or when they were triumphant.

Fritz Stern asks still other questions about the consequences of understanding history's lessons. He has challenged us to do what comes hardest: self-examination. He has shown us how to link historical analysis to choices determining the present and the future. In his famous speech to the German Bundestag in 1987, Professor Stern emphasized the importance of recognizing the power of freedom and of what he calls the spiritual influence on society. He said, "The Spirit cannot be principally and constantly apolitical; it must also inform the citizen and play a challenging, critical, and uncomfortable role."

Fritz Stern embodied this challenging spirit for many constituencies, well beyond the academy. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke called on him for advice as many others have done before in the realms of government, research centers, and foundations. Indeed, Fritz Stern was a valued trustee of the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies for many years. He also serves on the Board of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, with
which we share this program’s sponsorship. In all these capacities, among the many he has served, Fritz Stern has enriched the German–American dialogue with unflinching analyses of memories, real and imagined, and with a constant reminder that historical analysis should inform and challenge the citizen and scholar about the choices we face today and tomorrow. He has helped us not only to understand the past but to anticipate the future, and to direct our energies toward preparing for it.

The generations in Germany and in the United States who were shaped by the cataclysmic years of World War II gradually give way to those who have known five decades of German–American relations shaped by the Cold War and since 1989, by a new opportunity for Germany and for Europe. Agendas are changing, adjusting to new challenges and circumstances. Such changes do not come without friction. Some come with tragedy. Many still bear the hope of renewal. In responding to these challenges, Germany and the United States share many burdens and responsibilities. There was never a greater need for Germans and Americans to grasp each other’s visions and concerns and to engage each other in dialogue.

It is in these times that we look to Fritz Stern’s leadership and legacy providing us with a conceptual compass, with its needle firmly pointing toward the values we share, the questions we need to ask, and the ways in which we bring into balance that critical equation of remembrance and renewal. He has shown us the way for more than five decades. And for that, I say, on behalf of AICGS and on behalf of all of us, thank you, Fritz.

Jackson Janes
Director,
American Institute for
Contemporary German Studies
Professor Stern,
Colleagues,
Friends, and Family:

Almost thirty years ago, in 1968, Fritz Stern, together with the late Leonard Krieger, edited a collection of essays in honor of Hajo Holborn entitled The Responsibility of Power. In the editors' introduction to the Festschrift, Krieger and Stern suggested that Holborn influenced an entire generation of academics and contributed to the history of history. They further observed that Holborn's influence would not only include friends and students, but also public figures in both the United States and Europe.

Today we are pleased to honor Fritz Stern by also suggesting his wide influence within and outside the academy. He, too, has guided generations of students, stretching back to the 1950s and forward to the 1990s. This program celebrates his scholarly accomplishments and how these have shaped one's image of not only Germany, but America as well. Through his gracefully written books and essays, he has articulated a compelling vision of the variety of history which makes his scholarship so fresh and exciting.

One of the primary reasons for Stern's continuing influence is his awareness of history's contingency. As a graduate student at Columbia University, I still recall one of our Ph.D. seminar's first assignments: to read Sir Lewis Namier and write about how a particular event in history could not have happened. Most of us were already armed with the arrogance of early graduate-schoolitis: We thought we knew the answers; they were obviously in the documents! How we were soon humbled! In the seminar and in his contribution to the Holborn Festschrift, Stern warned us to avoid the over-interpretation of documents and their utilization as the end, rather than the means, of history. Referring to the then-recent Fritz Fischer controversy over Germany's role in initiating World War I, he wrote:

The present-day controversy is marked by a distressing literal-mindedness. Every "scrap of paper," every public document, has become sacrosanct and receives its own exaggerated exegesis. To understand motives and decisions, however, one has to probe not only the conditions of political cul-
ture, the tangible pressures and conflicts, but also the less tangible elements of milieu, atmosphere, and private reasoning and character.1

Stern’s forte has been his ability to evoke a political culture of previous epochs so as to make the reader and listener actually feel a part of that milieu. And to be part of that milieu does mean to understand the contingency of history rather than its inevitability toward a certain path. Such was the lesson of history I learned from him.

His essays and writings generally center on the individual and his or her place in history. Stern’s writings are also concerned with the fragility and the dangers of liberalism should liberalism and civility, in politics and in social intercourse, be threatened. Forced to leave Germany in the wake of the Kristallnacht (1938) as a young boy, Stern’s formative years were spent pondering the effects of totalitarianism and its appeal in his lost homeland. His adopted home, the United States, offered political asylum and a credo of political democracy which could be used as a measure of liberal values. As he once wrote after visiting Germany in 1954, less than ten years after Nazism’s defeat:

Liberalism—at its best, the institutionalization of decency—in practice is all too often dull, inadequate, and tolerant of what should be intolerable. Illiberalism, in turn, is often exciting and, in the short run, efficient.2

Yet Stern convincingly and cogently admonishes that illiberalism was a political failure for Germany, and, by implication, a failure for most political cultures, whether they be in the New World or the Old. I think it is a lesson worth remembering, and remembering in our nation’s capital.

On June 17, 1987, Stern had the honor to address the West German parliament, the first foreigner to do so. On this occasion, like so many others, Stern held up a historical mirror to the Germans, reminding the parliamentarians and the German public of that which he told his students:

This holiday [a commemoration of the victims of the 1953 uprising in East Berlin] ... should be neither forgotten nor misused. In the course of time, each great event is interpreted anew: our historical perspective changes, and with it our understanding ... It was established in the time of the Cold War: today it honors the victims ... and reminds us of changes in consciousness and in politics, but also of the power and duration of the purely provisional.\(^3\)

His remarks were delivered to commemorate a day which, until Germany’s unification in 1990, was the Federal Republic’s only national holiday. Stern’s reminder of history’s contingent nature again can be seen in the fact that the holiday no longer exists.

But if history is contingent and prophesy hazardous, one historical judgement seems secure: that Fritz Stern’s distinguished career has permanently enriched our historical understanding and the relations between the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany. And so we are grateful for the opportunity of honoring him on this occasion.

Marion F. Deshmukh
Department of History
George Mason University

Fritz Stern as Scholar
"The Politics of Cultural Despair"
Revisited

Jerry Z. Muller

Several years ago, a panel of European intellectuals convened in England under the auspices of the Central and East European Publishing Project. It drew up a list of the hundred most influential books published since 1945, a list recently published in the Times Literary Supplement. The committee acknowledged that there was an element of arbitrariness in its compilation—they might have invoked the "List der Vernunft"—but so far, no author who made the list has complained. And there, listed as one of the twenty-two most influential books of the 1960s, stands The Politics of Cultural Despair, published in 1961. It is to that book—its themes, its method, its reception, and its significance—that I want to turn. I also want to offer a sketch, however partial, of the setting in which The Politics of Cultural Despair was written.

The book began as a dissertation, completed in 1953. It took the form of a triple biography of Paul de Lagarde, Julius Langbehn, and Arthur Moeller van den Bruck. Lagarde reached his peak as a cultural critic in the late 1870s; Langbehn published his major contribution to Germanic cultural criticism, Rembrandt als Erzieher, in 1890; and Moeller van den Bruck's best-known political work, Das Dritte Reich, appeared in 1923. Stern used these three figures to trace the origins and development of what he called "the Germanic ideology," a cur-

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1 For the list and the circumstances leading to its compilation, see Times Literary Supplement, October 6, 1995, 39.

JERRY Z. MULLER is Professor of History at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. He received his Ph.D. in 1984 from Columbia University, where his doctoral advisor was Fritz Stern.
rent within German culture which he saw as one source of National Socialism.

The structure of triple biography that Stern employed seems to have come from his dissertation supervisor, Jacques Barzun, who had published his own triple biography, *Darwin, Marx, Wagner: Critique of a Heritage*, in 1941. Barzun’s purpose had been to examine the lives and work of three figures who had been contemporaries, with the aim of drawing attention to what he saw as the shared deterministic elements of their thought. Stern put the format of the triple biography to the very different use of tracing the development of what he called the politics of cultural despair over several generations, from the age of Bismarck to the age of Hitler. A number of other works using triple biographies as a basic structure were also written at the Columbia history department in those years, including Bruce Mazlish’s (never-published) dissertation, “Burke, Bonald and de Maistre: A Study in Conservatism,” completed in 1955; Michael Curtis’s *Three Against the Republic: Sorel, Barrès, and Maurras* (published in 1959), and Rudolph Binion’s *Defeated Leaders: The Political Fate of Caillaux, Jouvenel, and Tardieu* (a 1957 dissertation published in 1960).

Barzun does not seem to have deliberately encouraged the use of this structure, but a number of his students put it to uses of their own.

*The Politics of Cultural Despair* charted the genesis and diffusion of the antiliberal, antiurban, anti-Semitic, and anticapitalist animus that lay at the heart of völkisch thought, and suggested that it was the penetration of these themes into German culture that made National Socialism plausible to many educated, middle-class Germans. This was the element upon which initial reviewers seized. “His book shows how the German elite was culturally prepared for Nazism because proto-Nazi ideas had long been considered respectable,” noted Klaus Epstein.2 “The tragedy of the German educated classes in the half-century preceding the advent of Nazism was the way they allowed themselves to be seduced by the vacuous prophets of a spurious Deutschtum. ...” It is in tracing this connection that Mr. Stern is

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at his best,” wrote H. Stuart Hughes, and he predicted that “it is here that his book will have its widest appeal.”

The great achievement of The Politics of Cultural Despair was in delineating the links between German cultural history and the rise of National Socialism. Stern’s book was not the first to do so. But it did so with far greater subtlety, methodological sophistication, and plausibility than its predecessors. While Stern sought to demonstrate the link between trends in German culture and the rise of National Socialism, he did not mean to suggest that the sort of “cultural despair” he had traced was unique to German culture. Indeed, he insisted that the phenomenon of “cultural despair” was not confined to Germany, and that it had not ended with the defeat of Nazism. Nor did he claim that the success of Nazism could be explained primarily by the cultural developments he had traced; only that its success could not be understood without taking those cultural developments into account.

To put the book into context, it is worth recalling, however briefly, the sorts of treatment that the issue had already received when Stern’s book came on the scene. A number of works had attempted synoptic treatments of the intellectual origins of National Socialism. In 1941 the American political scientist William Montgomery McGovern published From Luther to Hitler. Those who know the book only from its title suppose it to have advanced a thesis of the continuity of German thought from Luther to Hitler. In fact, the book, subtitled “The History of Fascist-Nazi Political Philosophy,” was a history of ideas that explored what McGovern saw as the conflict between liberalism on the one hand and a “fascist tradition” on the other. This fascist tradition, in his interpretation,


5 William Montgomery McGovern, From Luther to Hitler: The History of Fascist-Nazi Political Philosophy (Boston, 1941).
combined earlier authoritarian and statist theories with the new emphasis on the power of the irrational, which was characteristic of late nineteenth-century European and American thought. The book actually placed little emphasis on the particularly German sources of National Socialism.

Perhaps the most influential work on National Socialism to appear during the decade of the 1950s was Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism*, first published in 1951. Among its many peculiarities was its studious refusal to draw any connection between National Socialism and the peculiarities of German culture or German national development. By contrast, Georg Lukács' *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft. Der Weg des Irrationalismus von Schelling zu Hitler*, which was published in East Berlin in 1954, focused almost exclusively on German thinkers. (Though not well known at the time, the book does appear in the bibliography of the book version of *The Politics of Cultural Despair*.\(^6\) ) Like McGovern, Lukács remained for the most part on the plane of the history of systematic ideas, and his sparse discussion of the social and political forces which made these ideas attractive never strayed far from the sure ground of the Leninist theory of imperialism and the Comintern's definition of fascism. Hans Kohn's book *The Mind of Germany* appeared in print a year before *The Politics of Cultural Despair*. Like the books by Lukács and Helmuth Plessner, Kohn's book was focused on Germany; like McGovern, it had a pastiche-like quality and remained largely on the plane of ideas and of major intellectuals.\(^7\) Plessner's *Das Schicksal deutschen Geistes im Ausgang seiner bürgerlichen Epoche* was little noticed when it was published in Holland in 1935; a second edition, published in 1959 under the title *Die verspätete Nation: Über die politische Verführbarkeit bürgerlichen Geistes*\(^8\) appeared too late to influence Stern's thinking. Among its minor themes was the transposition of unfulfilled religious longings onto the nation, a theme which Stern would also emphasize but which he seems to have drawn from other sources.

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\(^6\) Though with the date of publication mistakenly given as 1948.


\(^8\) Stuttgart, 1959.
On the whole, the relationship between National Socialism and German cultural traditions had been underplayed, not least because of the common assumption—maintained by many German émigrés—that the Nazi movement was comprised of the relatively uneducated "lower middle class" and exerted little attraction within the Bildungsbürgertum. Those books that did focus on the cultural background of National Socialism for the most part remained on the level of the history of ideas; and the thinkers whom they discussed often bore only a tenuous link to National Socialism. (McGovern, for example, included discussions of Hobbes and Hegel; Lukács managed to work Dilthey and Simmel into his exploration; and Hans Kohn went on for pages about Rilke.)

It is with this background in mind that we can appreciate the novelty of The Politics of Cultural Despair. Unlike the intellectual historical approach to understanding the origins of Nazism, Stern deliberately eschewed close conceptual reconstruction and analysis of the works of his Germanic ideologists, as inappropriate to the thinkers in question. He touched upon, but did not overly emphasize, their appropriation of ideas from more intellectually substantial figures such as Herder and Fichte. Instead, by placing the development of the Germanic ideologists into their original social, political, and cultural contexts, Stern managed to convey why the Germanic ideology might have seemed plausible not only to the Germanic ideologists themselves but to so many of their readers. Stern's careful reconstruction of the texture of cultural and political experience accounted for the resonance of the themes enunciated by Lagarde, Langbehn, and Moeller. The section on Lagarde, for example, re-captured the trauma which could accompany the decline of traditional religious belief. Stern's discussion of Langbehn showed that the revolt against scientism and the worship of art as expressed in Rembrandt als Erzieher was in keeping with much broader cultural trends. It was the widespread resonance of the cultural criticism of Lagarde and Langbehn, Stern contended, that opened the door to the legitimation of their anti-Semitism, imperialism, and aggressive

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10 Stern, Politics of Cultural Despair, 277ff.
nationalism, and in the chapters on Moeller he showed how these themes were intensified by the experience of the Great War, defeat, and the troubled polity of the Weimar Republic. The significance of the Germanic ideologists, Stern maintained, lay in their ability to appeal to the cultural elite as well as to the "political and cultural underworld of imperial and Weimar Germany."\(^{11}\)

To a far greater degree than previous writers, Stern traced the diffusion of *völkisch* ideas in Imperial Germany and in the Weimar Republic, in settings such as Bayreuth, in anti-Semitic leagues, in fraternities, and in coteries such as the Juni-Klub of the early 1920s. In short, *The Politics of Cultural Despair* raised the historical study of the cultural sources of support for National Socialism to a new level, through the book’s recreation of the texture of experience, the subtlety of its dissection of cultural influence, and not least, its vitality of expression. In each of these respects the book exemplified the program of synthetic cultural history that Stern’s doctoral advisor, Jacques Barzun, had laid out in his contribution to Stern’s anthology on *The Varieties of History*.\(^{12}\)

If *The Politics of Cultural Despair* was most successful as a study in the intersection of culture and politics, its author also aimed to link personality structure and politics with results that were, perhaps, less convincing. Stern claimed that the significance of his three subjects lay not only in the influence of their radical conservative ideas. He also saw them as sharing a common personality type, one in which personal psychic distress caused by familial unhappiness and failure to achieve professional recognition led to an extreme sensitivity to the spiritual discontents of their age.\(^{13}\) Stern characterized his Germanic ideologists as “malcontents,” and he suggested that recruits to National Socialism were so receptive to the ideas and slogans of the Germanic ideologists because they, too, were “malcontents.” The

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\(^{11}\) Ibid., 84.


book aimed "to show the importance of [this] new type of cultural malcontent, and to show how he facilitated the intrusion into politics of essentially unpolitical grievances." 14 "In the peculiar tension between their lives and their ideological aspirations," Stern claimed, Lagarde, Langbehn, and Moeller "anticipate the type of malcontent who, in the 1920s, found a haven in the idealism of the Hitler movement." 15 "The National Socialists," he wrote, "gathered together the millions of malcontents, of whose existence the conservative revolutionaries had for so long spoken, and for whose relief they had designed such dangerous and elusive ideals." 16

In the transition from the dissertation of 1954 to the book of 1961, the emphasis on the link between personality structure, ideological inclination, and political orientation was somewhat played down. In the dissertation version, Lagarde, Langbehn, and Moeller were contrasted to Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who, Stern thought, represented a character type and ideology more attractive to the self-satisfied supporters of the Kaiserreich. This argument was dropped in the transition from dissertation to book. 17 Nor was the purported link between personality structure and support for National Socialism essential to the argument of the book. For even if Stern was right that shared personal characteristics had led his three ideologists to develop the Germanic ideology, it is far from clear that subsequent Germans who encountered the work of the Germanic ideologists required a similar psychological disposition in order to be influenced by that ideology. One of the strongest elements of the book is its suggestion that radical conservative, völkisch conceptions increasingly came to be accepted within the institutions of German culture. If that is so, then it did not require a peculiar personality or psychic structure to accept ideas imbibed through normal cultural channels. Stern suggested (rightly, I think) that "A thousand teachers in republican Germany who in their youth had read and worshipped Lagarde or Langbehn were just as important to the triumph of National Socialism as all the putative millions of marks that Hitler col-

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14 Stern, Politics of Cultural Despair, xiv.
15 Ibid. For a similar earlier formulation, see Cultural Despair and Politics of Discontent, 7.
16 Stern, Politics of Cultural Despair, xxx.
17 Stern, Cultural Despair and Politics of Discontent, 229ff.
lected from German tycoons.” But, if so, then the willingness of their students to embrace *völkisch* solutions to the purported problems of modernity could be explained by cultural influence, rather than by any peculiarity of personality.

What led Fritz Stern to explore the relationship between personality structure, ideological inclination, and political orientation? Speculation about the link between personality structure and political behavior was very much in the intellectual air when Stern’s book was being written, and nowhere more so than among historians and social scientists at Columbia University. In the spring of 1954, Richard Hofstadter gave a lecture on “The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt,” which was subsequently published in *The American Scholar* and then republished in *The New American Right*, an extremely influential collection of essays on the phenomenon of McCarthyism, edited by Daniel Bell and written by scholars in or around Columbia University. Hofstadter distinguished between an “interest politics”—which he seemed to regard as normal and normative in liberal capitalist societies—and what he called “status politics,” which he characterized as “the clash of various projective rationalizations arising from status aspirations and other personal motives.” “Political life,” Hofstadter contended,

is not simply an arena in which the conflicting interests of various social groups in concrete material gains are fought out; it is also an arena into which status aspirations and frustrations are, as the psychologists would say, projected. It is at this point that the issues of politics, or the pretend issues of politics, become interwoven with and dependent upon the personal problems of individuals.\(^19\)

In his introduction to *The New American Right*, Daniel Bell concurred with Hofstadter’s assumption that “the tendency to convert issues into ideologies, to invest them with moral color and high emotional charge, invites conflicts which can only damage a society.”\(^20\) These

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themes found their echo in Stern's analysis of the "malcontents" who "facilitated the intrusion into politics of essentially unpolitical grievances."

Hofstadter set out to explore "the neglected social-psychological elements in pseudo-conservatism." He used the term "pseudo-conservatism," he explained,

because its exponents, although they believe themselves to be conservatives and usually employ the rhetoric of conservatism, show signs of a serious and restless dissatisfaction with American life, traditions and institutions. They have little in common with the temperate and compromising spirit of true conservatism in the classical sense of the word. ... Their political reactions express rather a profound if largely unconscious hatred of our society and its ways—a hatred which one would hesitate to impute to them if one did not have suggestive clinical evidence.

Hofstadter took the term pseudoconservatism (and perhaps the "clinical evidence" as well) from The Authoritarian Personality by Theodor Adorno and his collaborators, which had been published in 1950. Nor was The Authoritarian Personality the only contemporary attempt to link personality structure and antidemocratic political movements. Far more widely read in its own day (though far less remembered today) was Eric Hoffer's The True Believer, published in 1951, and cited by Stern in his doctoral dissertation and again in The Politics of Cultural Despair. It was in this milieu that what Stern was to call his "exploration of politics as psychodrama" took shape.

The assumption that shared political belief and action can best be explained by similarities of personality structure has frequently been called into question by subsequent social scientists. As a working

21 Ibid., 40.
25 For the fate of this mode of analyzing McCarthyism and later movements on the right, see William B. Hixson, Jr., The Search for the American Right Wing: An Analysis of the Social Science Record, 1955–1987 (Princeton, N. J., 1992). At least
hypothesis it played a salutary role in leading Stern to explore the psychological genesis of "the Germanic ideology" in the biographical circumstances of Lagarde, Langbehn, and Moeller. When Stern examined the relationship between psyche and ideology in The Politics of Cultural Despair, he did so undogmatically; and his emphasis, as I have indicated, was on tracing the social, political, and cultural contexts in which the Germanic ideologists developed their ideas and the channels through which they were disseminated.

The link between the decline of belief in a transcendent God and the rise of all-encompassing, apocalyptic political movements had been suggested at least as early as Erich Voegelin’s Die politischen Religionen of 1938, and the theme would later be developed by other religious thinkers. Though Stern was neither the first nor the last historian to examine the significance of the process of secularization for modern German political culture, his sensitivity to the psychic and cultural costs of secularization was unusual for a historian not writing from an identified religious position. (Unlike some religious apologists, Stern never concluded that the linkage of secularization with the rise of apocalyptic political movements of the Right or the Left implied the need for a return to traditional religious belief.) In The Politics of Cultural Despair he showed that the declining plausibility of Protestantism left men like Lagarde and Langbehn with a religious thirst that was slaked by investing their own beliefs with the passion of religion.

Stern seems to have been influenced, early and permanently, by the work of Franz Schnabel, a liberal Catholic historian, whose volume on religion in his Deutsche Geschichte im XIX. Jahrhundert traced the process by which substantive theological content was attenuated among German Protestants in the late eighteenth and early nine-

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one of the contributors to The New American Right has recently noted that he no longer finds "'status deprivation' or some other socio-psychological phenomenon" useful in explaining the McCarthyite brand of anticommunism. Nathan Glazer, review of Richard Gid Powers' Not without Honor in The New Republic, March 4, 1996, 44.

26 Erich Voegelin, Die politischen Religionen (Stockholm, 1939), cited in the bibliographies of both Cultural Despair and Politics of Discontent and Politics of Cultural Despair.

In the three-and-a-half decades since the publication of *The Politics of Cultural Despair*, Stern has often recurred to the theme of secularization and its discontents, and especially to what he has called the "silent secularization" of German Protestantism. In Germany, Stern has suggested, the retreat from the substance of religious belief within Protestantism was partially disguised by the replacement of theology with reverence for *Kultur*, and eventually with *German* culture as an object of veneration among the *Bildungsbürgertum*. It was this gradual hollowing out of religion through the substitution of secular causes and culture in place of theological content which helps explain the appeal of the pseudoreligious elements of National Socialism, and the images of salvation so often associated with it.

The power of the phrase "silent secularization" calls to mind an important and perhaps underrated element of Fritz Stern’s influence as a historian: his talent for coining memorable phrases and epigrams. Think of the influence of Sternian coinages such as "the unpolitical German," "the politics of cultural despair," or of epigrams such as "Capitalism is too serious a subject to be left to the economic historians alone." The potency of these formulations comes not only from their ability to capture a phenomenon in a few words, but from their tendency to suggest more than they assert, to intimate more than they specify, and to provoke the mind to further reflection. Stern’s admiration for Nietzsche can be traced less to his affinity for the substance of Nietzsche’s thought than to what he has called the "irresistible style" of Nietzsche’s prose aphorisms.

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29 In "Germany 1933: Fifty Years Later" and "National Socialism as Temptation," in *Dreams and Delusions: The Drama of German History* (New York, 1987).


31 See especially Stern’s essay, “National Socialism as Temptation.”


33 Stern, *Cultural Despair* and *Politics of Discontent*, 264. The phrase is repeated in *The Politics of Cultural Despair*. 
Fritz Stern's aesthetic sense as an author and speaker, his concern for style, is part of what defines him as a historian. He came of age intellectually at Columbia University in an academic environment in which scholars prized not only depth of research and analytic acuity, but the ability to convey their findings to an audience beyond their own disciplines and indeed beyond the academy. *The Politics of Cultural Despair* remains a model of how to write history that connects politics and culture, and how to do so in a style that can appeal to both scholars and laymen. I hope I have suggested not only why the book was noteworthy when it first appeared some three-and-a-half decades ago, but why it may still be worth reading three-and-a-half decades from now.
"Historian of Fate." Fritz Stern on the History of German Jewry: An Appreciation

David Sorkin

It is a single pleasure for me to offer this appreciation of Professor Fritz Stern. While I neither studied with Professor Stern nor know him personally—I once met him briefly at a session of the American Historical Association in San Francisco in the late 1970s when, as a graduate student, I mumbled a few words of greeting—I have long been a student and an admirer of his work.

If asked to classify Professor Stern's scholarship, few people would, I think, readily identify him as an historian of German Jewry. Yet he has made a significant contribution to the subject. This situation is most telling. It shows that Professor Stern has come to the study of German Jewry not from an intrinsic interest in Jewish history or as a self-identified historian of the Jews but rather for a different set of reasons, reasons which might best be illuminated by examining his scholarship in relationship to a handful of scholars whom I would call the "historians of fate."

In the 1930s many German Jews referred to themselves as a "community of fate" (Schicksalsgemeinschaft), meaning that what bound them together were not the internal markers of faith or affiliation, but rather the forcibly imposed marker of Nazi racial definition. Professor Stern has pointed to this phenomenon in the scientist Fritz

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Haber, who wrote from exile in England in the summer of 1933 that, "In my whole life I have never been so Jewish as now."¹

The "historians of fate" belong to the younger generation of émigrés who left Germany or Austria as adolescents and finished their education in their adopted homes, whether the United States or the United Kingdom. A slightly older émigré, such as Hannah Arendt, had finished her formal education in Europe and was able to call upon it to comprehend her experience. In contrast, the "historians of fate"—and here, for reasons that will soon become apparent, I would name Peter Pulzer, the Gladstone Professor at Oxford, and George Mosse, Emeritus Bascom Professor at the University of Wisconsin and Koebner Professor at the Hebrew University—used the methods and intellectual traditions of their adopted homeland, whether America or England, combined with an acute awareness of the weaknesses and inhibitions of German scholarship, to search for an explanation for the phenomenon of the Third Reich, that phenomenon which, in changing the course of the twentieth century, aroused their historical awareness and also altered the course of their lives. As Professor Stern has written on a number of occasions, his political education began on January 30, 1933.² Fritz Stern, Peter Pulzer, and George Mosse first attempted to come to grips with the phenomenon of Nazism by exploring its roots. Educated at Cambridge University, Peter Pulzer employed the venerable English methods of political history in his *The Rise of Political Antisemitism in Germany and Austria* (1964). George Mosse, trained at Harvard, used the distinctly American methods of cultural history and political symbolism in his *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (1964). Professor Stern deftly deployed the methods of cultural biography that he had learned from his teacher Jacques Barzun at Columbia in his elegant and trenchant, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the German Ideology* (1961). These three books all became standard texts for a generation of historians and

¹ Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Delusions: The Drama of German History* (New York, 1987), 74.
students preoccupied with the effort to understand Nazism. As Fritz Stern has observed:

The postwar generation—my generation—had its share of undeserved good fortune. We grew up—whether in the United States or in Europe—at a time when Europe was the center of passionate political and ideological conflict. Europe was dramatically inescapable. ... "Why National Socialism?" no longer grips a young generation with the immediacy that it gripped its predecessors.³

These three scholars were lauded for having brought unexpected rigor and new insights to the understanding of Nazism’s origins. Yet the commonality of their intellectual trajectory continued.

Each in his own way realized that Nazism was only one side of the coin. The other side was German Jewry; and each in his characteristic way has turned to that subject. Peter Pulzer has written a political history of German Jewry from the revolution of 1848 to the Nazi seizure of power, moving beyond stereotypes and conventional pieties to the hard facts of political ideas and participation, candidacies, and voting patterns.⁴ George Mosse has investigated cultural loyalties and legacies, exploding the myth of one-dimensional assimilation by focusing on German Jewry’s dynamic attachment to the ideal of self-formation (Bildung) and the heritage of the Enlightenment.⁵

Professor Stern has tackled the stereotype of a German Jewry that was held to be “the epitome of craven assimilation and submission,” and has come to serve as a “category of disapprobation” as a result of reading history “from the disaster backward.”⁶ He has offered an alternative portrait of Wilhelmine and Weimar German Jewry using the method of biography.

Why biography? Stern has quoted his teacher Jacques Barzun at length.

³ [We] must assert what no one questions in theory and everybody violates in practice, namely that the complexity of life, taken both quantitatively and qualitatively, is greater than our documentary, chronological and criti-

⁵ George Mosse, German Jews Beyond Judaism (Bloomington, Ind., 1985).
⁶ Stern, Dreams and Delusions, 99.
tical schemes allow for. The clues and witnesses are, to begin with, very nu-
merous, taken as brute facts by themselves. But they are, even so, a vast
oversimplification of the past ... but huge as this harvest of clues may
seem, it is not enough. The Ariadne's thread is missing. It is found in no
letter, no archive, no encyclopedia. It must be spun from one's inner con-
sciousness, at great risk of error and on guard against cocksure superiority.
Hence the need for a priori sympathy, in the exact meaning of that term:
feeling with.7

It is the historian who spins the "Ariadne's thread" that makes his-
tory understandable, and he does so by sympathetically reading the
sources, and especially the sources of individual lives. Fritz Stern has
emphasized that history does not consist of impersonal forces but of
the "interplay" between those forces and significant individuals.

I am drawn to studying earlier periods through individuals who are of in-
trinsic and representative importance. Of course there are "the broad,
anonymous forces" that characterize the setting or structure of an age, but
it is the interplay between these forces and actual people that allows us to
recapture something of the spirit of an age. In this fashion one can hope
to detect not only the rational political motives of particular actors, but
perhaps something of their less conscious, more spontaneous responses as
well.8

To understand German Jewry, Professor Stern has assembled a
trio of figures who represent a spectrum of achievements and com-
mitments. They offer an "Ariadne's thread" to the history of Wil-
helmine and Weimar Jewry.

The first of the trio was Gerson Bleichröder, to whom Professor
Stern has devoted his monumental study. Through years of assidu-
ous digging in obscure, forgotten, or neglected archives, Fritz Stern
has rescued Bleichröder from the oblivion to which most German
historians wittingly, and some unwittingly, consigned him. While
Bismarck was celebrated in countless ways, Bleichröder was con-
demned to the occasional footnote or brief annotation.

In his memoirs Bismarck neglected to mention Bleichröder, and Bismarck's
editors and biographers followed suit by pretending that Bleichröder was a

7 Jacques Barzun, "Truth in Biography: Berlioz," quoted in Stern, Dreams and
Delusions, 274–75; emphasis in the original.
8 Stern, Dreams and Delusions, 5–6. Stern seems especially sympathetic to the
method of Carlyle. See Fritz Stern, The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the
Present (New York, 1956), 90–91, as well as the introduction to that volume.
person of minimal, marginal importance. In his lifetime, his allegedly evil influence was often exaggerated; posthumously, he was condemned to undeserved obscurity. But Bleichröder had probably sensed what we now know: that for a third of a century he had played a major role in Bismarck's Germany, that he helped to shape that Germany, and that its chancellor had grown dependent on him. What he probably did not understand was that the peculiar combination of his successes and his humiliations was symptomatic of the deeply flawed relations of Germans and Jews.9

Bismarck and Bleichröder were "the representative men" of the new Germany, yet Bleichröder violated the public codes of that aristocratic, state-centered, and rank-conscious society: he represented money and the nexus of money and politics, a nexus that was indignantly denied but insistently present. "Bleichröder was held up as the principal exhibit of mysterious Jewish power, consisting of political connection, vast wealth, and boundless ambition."10 This made him the exemplary self-made man or parvenu par excellence in a society which, at its apex, by according pedigree pride of place, doomed merit and achievement to a demeaning second best. Bleichröder's Jewishness brought these issues into relief, but the issues themselves were not peculiar to Jews. "Bleichröder's struggle for acceptance was an extreme instance of a common experience. It was made extreme by his Jewishness."11 Or, as Professor Stern formulated it on another occasion: "The history of German Jewry in its century of seeming freedom described in a particularly intense and elusive manner what we commonly call the problem of identity."12

The enduring paradox of Bleichröder was that while posterity accuses German Jews of submission, anti-Semites of the time accused Jews of virtually unlimited and corrupting power and saw Bleichröder as its avatar.

There were many variations on anti-Semitism, but at the core of all was the belief that the pariahs had become the true owner in the new Germany, that Jews were not only despicable but mortally dangerous.13

10 Stern, Dreams and Delusions, 106.
11 Ibid., 279.
12 Ibid., 111–12.
13 Stern, Gold and Iron, 495.
What was the truth? Fritz Stern characteristically shows that the truth was irreducibly complex, neither simply the one nor the other.

Bleichröder could exercise certain kinds of power, yet it was a power that derived from his connections with others. Bleichröder’s was the power of a member of a minority group which, despite full legal emancipation, was plagued by administrative discrimination and kept at a distance from direct power. “Jews were tacitly banned from all positions of political power, indeed from all visible identification with dignified power.” While aware of those limitations, Bleichröder was both submissive and aggressive, at times an active supplicant, at times an active advocate—for himself above all, but also for the people and causes in which he believed, including the Jews. Fritz Stern has incontrovertibly demonstrated that the long-neglected Bleichröder played a major role in the creation of Germany, with his presence at Versailles its enduring symbol. Yet Bleichröder also did everything in his power to advance the interests of German and European Jewry, whether in securing international guarantees of emancipation for the Jews of Rumania or attempting the same for the Jews of Russia. Both of these efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, as they depended on a misplaced faith in “the efficacy of political protection.” Bleichröder’s power was real enough, but far more contingent and circumscribed than what the anti-Semites attributed to him.

Fritz Stern has also shown that if Bleichröder was the representative German Jew of his age, then German Jewry was also less craven than posterity would have it. Bleichröder was the first Jew to be ennobled without conversion. Whether conversion would have hastened his ennoblement or simply offered further cause for derision, is impossible to say. After all, his very ennoblement defies simple explanation: was it for his role at Versailles or for rescuing court circles from the financial ruin threatened by the collapse of the Rumanian railroads? Be that as it may, Bleichröder remained a proud and “faithful” Jew who served on the Executive of the Berlin Jewish community. Bleichröder was, of course, guilty of “pompous servil-

14 Stern, Dreams and Delusions, 107.
15 Stern, Gold and Iron, 380.
16 Ibid., 57.
ity,” but that was a sin of which his entire age was culpable. His true sin was his presumption to be accepted as a full member of the German aristocracy.

By fervently embracing the values of an elite that defined his kind as an outsider, by seeking to mold his life in accordance with these dominant values and customs, he condemned himself to perpetual vulnerability. Genuine acceptance by the highest levels of German society was a mirage that lured Gerson ... ever deeper into a wilderness of unrealizable ambitions from which there was no return.

Yet even here the reality was not simple. Did Bleichröder feel the social slights and insults, or did these swirl unheard and unfelt behind his back? Fritz Stern has asserted that, “obtuseness was the key to social success—just as intelligence was the condition of his material success.” He has also elegantly summarized what the sources allow one to ascertain.

For services rendered the Prussian Crown and German Reich had amply rewarded him. Only the sense of belonging and security, only the sense of safe acceptance, had been withheld. And that perhaps is the essence of the anguish of assimilation.

The other two figures in Fritz Stern’s trio are scientists of the generation after Bleichröder. Albert Einstein and Fritz Haber were as famous as Bleichröder or, given Bleichröder’s reputation in the 1880s and 1890s, as famous as he was infamous. Their fame rested on scientific achievement rather than money and intimacy with political power. Yet they also did not escape the disappointments and hostility, in Fritz Stern’s words, “the ambivalence,” that went with being a Jew in Germany. Were they craven and submissive? Were they mistaken in their attachment to Germany? Indeed not. They were daring scientists who were as much a product of German science and culture as any other, and they found their independent path in politics and life—as the contrast between them unmistakably demonstrates.

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17 Ibid., 115.
18 Ibid., 466.
19 Ibid., 467.
20 Ibid., 541.
21 Stern, Dreams and Delusions, 111.
Einstein was "the solitary master, the genius of theoretical creation." His scientific achievement made him "the first scientist-hero to appear in the Western world." Yet he worked with other scientists, both Jewish and non-Jewish, and his years in Berlin, where he was lured by an appointment at the Prussian Academy of Sciences in 1914, were a time of friendship and collegiality.

Einstein's Germany included gentiles and Jews, working together in extraordinary harmony. And still it can be stated categorically that none of the Jewish scientists escaped the ambiguity, the intermittent hostility, that Jewishness produced in Imperial and Weimar Germany. Neither fame nor achievement, neither the Nobel prize nor baptism, offered immunity.

Yet "he was a rebel from the start," beginning with his own education and extending to his scientific thinking and to his politics, where he "placed his scientific fame at the service of his moral indignation." A pacifist during the Great War and an internationalist thereafter, he eventually came to identify with Jewish causes, including Zionism, though his idiosyncratic rebelliousness never allowed him to become a party fixture—"he was the antithesis of an organization man." He always spoke his mind, sometimes naively so. In Fritz Stern's words: "he was a simple man of complex roles.

In contrast to Einstein, Fritz Haber was "the impresario of collective greatness, the genius of practical achievement." Also a Nobel prize winner, Haber was at the center of Germany's scientific achievements in his capacity as director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physical Chemistry and Electrochemistry. Unlike his good friend Einstein, Haber was a patriot who put his scientific expertise at the disposal of the German war effort: "science, he once said, belonged to humanity in peacetime and to the fatherland in war." Yet unlike most of his fellow academics, he became an ardent supporter of the Weimar Republic and played a key role in helping to

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22 Ibid., 70.
23 Ibid., 27.
24 Ibid., 46.
25 Ibid., 27, 33.
26 Ibid., 41.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 70.
29 Ibid., 63.
rehabilitate German scientists in the international community.\textsuperscript{30} Though he converted to Protestantism at the age of twenty-four, Haber also experienced the anti-Semitism that bedeviled the Weimar Republic. Yet as Fritz Stern has written:

Haber’s own experiences or those of his friends or the murder of Rathenau probably never made him think that the collegial bonds, to say nothing of the basic rights of Jews, would be altered. On any kind of unconscious psychic balance sheet, the good would incomparably have outweighed the bad.\textsuperscript{31}

Electing premature retirement on October 1, 1933, in response to the Decree for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, Haber was stunned by the silence of some colleagues. Haber died in January, 1934, and

A year later, Max Planck and Max von Laue organized a memorial service for Haber, sponsored by the Kaiser Wilhelm Society, a courageous act at that time, perhaps the only one of its kind in the Third Reich.\textsuperscript{32}

As much as Fritz Stern’s trio of biographies illuminates the history of the Jews in Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany, it is not intended as a contribution to internal Jewish history but rather, like the work of the other “historians of fate,” as an effort to demonstrate that German Jewry was “a signal element in the history of modern Germany.”\textsuperscript{33} This attempt to reintegrate the history of German Jewry into the “drama of German history” constitutes the ultimate repudiation of the fate that Hitler and the Third Reich inflicted on German Jewry. Fritz Stern’s historical enterprise aims to restore to German Jewry the dignity of its complex history, affirming that though “the German-Jewish partnership or collaboration” may have been an illusion, it was “an enticing illusion, an illusion productive of greatness.”\textsuperscript{34} At the same time, this enterprise challenges Germans to recognize the dilemmas that their history posed in the past and continues to pose in the present. And for historians it is a model of craft and conscience. By affirming that “we owe that past no less than we

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 68–69.
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 69.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 74.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 99.
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 114.
\end{itemize}
owe any past—a sense of its integrity,” it turns the very act of comprehension into a confrontation with our individual and collective selves, making history, as Fritz Stern wrote about Ernst Reuter, “at once a liberating and a demanding force.”

35 Ibid., 48, 93.
In 1977 Fritz Stern published a dual biography of Bleichröder and Bismarck. Biographies are a classical method of dealing with the past, one that appears to be as common today as it was in earlier generations. Dual biographies are, however, quite rare. Examples do exist, of course. Biographies of the brothers Heinrich and Thomas Mann, Samuel Johnson and Boswell, and Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell immediately come to mind. The first question that arises is why Stern did not simply write a book about Bleichröder, a figure of great significance in the early decades of the second empire, who had, one notes with some incredulity, been completely ignored by historians—although not by contemporary statesmen. Attending the Congress of Berlin, the astute British prime minister, Benjamin Disraeli, wrote to Queen Victoria that “Bleichröder is Prince Bismarck’s intimate, attends him every morning and according to his own account, is the only individual who dares to speak the truth to his highness.”¹ Bismarck’s son, Herbert, often expressed his resentment at the frequent and easy access that Bleichröder had to his father. When the British ambassador in the 1870s approached Bismarck about the reliability of Bleichröder’s information, Bismarck replied, “Are you aware ... that Bleichröder administers my private fortune? If so, do you think I would mislead him.”² In the 1880s, the Russian ambas-

2 Ibid., 106. Lord Odo Russell was told by the British government in the 1870s how reliable Bleichröder’s information was.

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sador to Berlin used Bleichröder as his main conduit for secret contacts with Bismarck. Indeed, Stern makes a good case that Bleichröder's influence over the chancellor was one of the grounds for William II's desire to dismiss Bismarck in 1890.

Nevertheless, several generations of scholars failed to introduce Bismarck's banker and confidant to their audience. Thus, Stern, having gained access to the Bleichröder papers, could have written the first major study of Germany's most prominent banker for a quarter of a century. But he chose not to do that. The reason, no doubt, lay in his discovery of how close the relationship was between the chancellor and the banker. Another reason, one may speculate, was Bleichröder's conspicuous absence from the myriad publications about the "Iron Chancellor." While a biography of Bleichröder would have been a first, Bismarck had already been the subject of sixty-two scholarly biographies and hundreds of articles for a grand total of 6,025 publications. No doubt Bleichröder's invisibility has to do with the great reverence for Bismarck by generations of German scholars and their disdain for the tawdry economic and financial arena (the filthy lucre) of life, which was not deemed worthy of significant attention by gentlemen. Consequently, Bismarck the public figure was considered; however, the landowner, manufacturer, taxpayer, investor, borrower, and even the speculator were ignored.

To the benefit of all scholars of nineteenth-century Germany, Stern saw the vacuum that existed and sought to fill it with a dual biography. Unlike his predecessors who sought to present a complete frontal or total view of Bismarck (at least in the public sphere), Stern endeavored to give us a profile, a profile from one vantage point or one angle: that of the chancellor's banker. This may result in a sharper image, one with greater definition.

When he conceptualized his research project in the sixties, Stern was not alone in seeking to turn our attention to the importance of economics. Social science and modernization theory were all the

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3 This is quite remarkable, given the critical role of Bleichröder and his frequent contact with Bismarck. This shunning of Bleichröder continued after Stern's book was published. Lothar Gall scarcely mentions Bismarck's banker in his two-volume biography of Bismarck published in 1980. However, Otto Pflanze gives Bleichröder a significant role in his three-volume biography of 1990.

rage. In Germany scholars such as Karl Dietrich Bracher, Wolfgang Sauer, and Rudolf Morsey were utilizing the latest techniques of political science to analyze the collapse of the Weimar Republic.\(^5\) Ralf Dahrendorf deftly utilized his sociological training to examine the failure of Germany to evolve into a liberal democratic society before the success of the Federal Republic.\(^6\) Two works directed our attention to the territory of the economist. The first was a sizeable tome entitled *Deutschlands Weg zur Großmacht*.\(^7\) In this book, Helmut Böhme sought to convince us that too much attention had been paid to the political dimension of German unification. He argued that the crisscrossing of central Europe by railroads and the increasing integration of the economies of the states in the German Bund, particularly the gradual expansion of the *Zollverein*, constituted the critical variable in the achievement of nationhood. For Böhme, economic union and modernization was the heart of the story, not Sedan, Königgrätz, or Düppel.

The other work that commanded our attention in the sixties was Hans Rosenberg’s *Große Depression und Bismarckzeit*.\(^8\) Refining the cyclical theories of Kondratiev and Schumpeter, Rosenberg analyzed the Bismarckian era in terms of twenty-five-year swings of prosperity and depression. He linked the turn toward protection, the rise of anti-Semitism, and the social legislation of the 1880s to the depression that allegedly had overwhelmed Germany during Bismarck’s two decades in power. We now look back on these two books as structuralist. Most younger scholars today will shake their heads and tell


\(^{6}\) Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (Garden City, N. J., 1967).


\(^{8}\) Hans Rosenberg, *Große Depression und Bismarckzeit* (Berlin, 1967). Rosenberg’s book was preceded by a scholarly talk on the impact of the depression in 1940 at the American Historical Association conference. The combination of Böhme and Rosenberg’s books appearing within a year of each other put economic history front and center for German historians of the nineteenth century.
us that these works (apart from having “privileged” economic history) implicitly deny human agency; they deny the ability of humans to determine the kind of world they live in.

What is singularly impressive about Stern’s *Gold and Iron* is that he recognized the importance of the economic realm but avoided the pitfalls of structuralism when it was unchallenged. Whether this makes Stern an antistructuralist or a prestructuralist, or perhaps even an early poststructuralist, I am not sure. What is clear is that he rejected the idea that the past is determined by broad anonymous forces that the historian must unveil. While he sought to shift the attention of historians toward the economic sphere (and in that sense his work parallels that of Böhme and Rosenberg), he did not believe that doing so necessarily meant transcending individual behavior. For Stern the major figures in Imperial Germany must be held accountable for their actions. Contingency plays a significant role in *Gold and Iron*. Reductionism, the most tempting sin of the historian, is avoided. Neither Bismarck’s successes nor his failures were ordained. Decisions that were made by the main protagonists could have been reversed or not made at all. Bismarck’s decision to annex Alsace-Lorraine is considered a serious mistake. The alliance with Austria-Hungary was not inevitable; indeed the emperor strongly opposed it, and Bleichröder warned Bismarck, “to ally ourselves with Austria-Hungary is to attach ourselves to a cadaver.”

Looking at Bismarck from the vantage point of a banker results in some unexpected insights. One is that serious financial problems constrained Prussian foreign policy in the 1860s. Given the absence of approved budgets and the continuing constitutional crisis, Bismarck found it exceedingly difficult to borrow the funds needed for the wars with Denmark and Austria. Although Lothar Gall denies it, (and most scholars ignore it altogether), Stern clearly establishes that Bismarck’s policies in the sixties, particularly their timing, were conditioned by the availability of loans to the Prussian state. Only two bankers, Hansemann and Bleichröder, were willing to back an ag-

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10 Ibid., chap. 3. The discussion of the critical necessity for loans to fight both Denmark and the Habsburg Monarchy is, perhaps, the most important contribution of Stern’s book. It is denied explicitly by Gall, but the evidence that Stern provides is overwhelming.
gressive Prussian policy. After all, the myth of the invincible Prussian army had yet to be established. Even General Albrecht von Roon exulted that loans “give us a free hand in foreign policy.” Treitschke and others were to forget this pivotal role of a Jew in the achievement of German statehood, as did subsequent generations of historians, until Stern rectified this omission.\(^{11}\) Such was the importance Bismarck attached to finances that he conversed with Bleichröder frequently about ways to prevent the Habsburgs from gaining loans on the European money markets.

Over time Bismarck learned to look at Europe through the lens of his banker as well as through the eyes of a statesman. He commissioned and used reports on the economic situation of the nations with which he had to deal. Loans were granted and rejected (as in the case of Russia in the 1880s) based on the friendly or adversarial relations he was pursuing with a particular nation. Economics became a commonly used branch of foreign policy in Imperial Germany, and in this sense Franz Schnabel, A. J. P. Taylor, and others are mistaken in seeing Bismarck as a typical statesman of the ancien regime.\(^{12}\) This is another case where European scholars have until recently been led astray by their distaste for integrating the realm of economics into the study of politics and foreign policy. As Stern points out, Bismarck spent several years in Frankfurt, the financial capital of central Europe, and these years (which were, coincidentally, during the railway boom) made him aware of the increasing significance and dynamism of the financial middle class. The years in Frankfurt separate the verkrampfte Junker of the past from the later statesman who was sensitive to the economic forces that were in the process of transforming central Europe.

While Stern makes an important contribution in stressing the world of banks, investments, and stock markets, he does not give in to the temptation to view this arena as the most important, the nu-

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\(^{11}\) Ibid., 63. Anti-Semitic historians, such as Heinrich von Treitschke, chose to ignore the importance of Bleichröder's contribution to the achievement of a German national state.

nexus of power in the Kaiserrich. His book treats the most powerful political figure for some twenty-seven years and perhaps the wealthiest individual in the empire during these same years. When the two realms of economics and politics come together, Stern has no doubt that the political is the pre-eminent domain. He rejects simple formulas and, when contemplating the connection between money and power, he sees "a world more complex, more intertwined, more variegated, more fascinating, and less certain than people have assumed."13 Bleichröder was, of course, a Jew. There were inherent limitations in the ability of someone coming from a tiny (1 percent) minority whose civil rights were only guaranteed fully in 1867; that is, in Bleichröder's adult life. One of *Gold and Iron*’s major themes, which I will discuss later, is the inability of German Jews to transfer their affluence in Imperial Germany and their newly won constitutional rights into a genuine feeling of acceptance by the prevailing Christian culture. Unless I am mistaken, Stern’s assignment of the economic sphere to an important but secondary level in terms of power goes beyond Bleichröder’s Jewish faith.

Stern’s assessment derives from his careful study of Germany’s central government and its functioning during Bismarck’s reign of power. As he points out, the elite considered economic issues in foreign policy of lesser importance, so much so that they would tolerate a converted Jew in that section of the foreign ministry. One can only surmise what the division of power would have been if someone like Hansemann, a banker in the Ruhr, had been Germany’s foremost banker. In the end what is surprising is the extent to which economics did play a role in a state dominated by an agrarian elite. The belief that it was somehow in the saddle has never been convincingly demonstrated, and Stern provides evidence to the contrary.

This raises another issue in recent historiography, namely, der *Primat der Innenpolitik.* Eckart Kehr and Hans-Ulrich Wehler have stressed the importance of domestic issues in determining Bismarck’s

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13 Stern, *Gold and Iron*, 306. It is one of the virtues of *Gold and Iron* that it avoids simple formulas regarding the relationship of wealth and power in Imperial Germany.
foreign policy as Jacob Buckhardt did a century ago. In Otto Pflanze's three-volume biography of Bismarck, this theory is dismissed out of court, and, Stern does write, "diplomacy was Bismarck's life. For him the primacy of foreign policy was not some kind of academic tenet." Nevertheless, when read carefully, Gold and Iron presents a rather more complex analysis of the relationship of foreign to domestic policy. For instance, Bismarck unquestioningly accepted the task of promoting exports and did mix domestic and foreign policy when he used all kinds of threats to induce Rumania to pay a number of aristocratic German investors who were in danger of suffering enormous losses. More pointed, in 1865 Bismarck said that "Austria's more conservative position at home will demand a more forceful one abroad just as with us." And elsewhere he recognized that a war "would have a beneficial effect on the solution of the internal [Prussian] conflict." Stern further points out that both the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine and the enthusiastic colonialism of the mid-1880s were not unrelated to the battles between the chancellor and the Progressives. While wisely rejecting the mechanical application of the Primat der Innenpolitik, he does recognize that Bismarck was too clever a man to ignore the domestic implications of his diplomacy.

An aspect of Bismarck's life that had been omitted from the multitude of biographies has been his personal wealth and investments, as well as his role as a landlord. We now accept it as normal for a historical biographer to investigate the private as well as the public life of his or her subject. But this was not taken for granted even a generation ago, and the classical biographies of Bismarck scarcely

14 See the collection of Kehr's scholarly articles, Der Primat der Innenpolitik (Berlin, 1965), and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Das deutsche Kaiserreich 1871-1918 (Göttingen, 1973).
15 See Pflanze's statement, "The most notable fact about the German experience during 1878-1883 was the absence of a connection between foreign and domestic affairs, that might well have occurred but did not." Otto Pflanze, Bismarck and the Development of Germany, 3 vols. (Princeton, N. J., 1990), 3:96, 253, 431ff.
17 Ibid., 61.
touch the surface of his private life.\textsuperscript{18} Having access to all of Bleichröder’s records gave Stern a unique opportunity (and one which he utilized superbly) to give us a portrait of the private figure, and it is not a pretty picture at all. The founder of the German empire was not a generous man, not even after he amassed enormous wealth and had become, as a result of gifts from the thankful Hohenzollern’s, a prince with vast land holdings. Stern’s careful analysis shows Bismarck to have earned about 330,000 marks a year in the 1880s at a time when only fifteen hundred Prussians earned over 100,000 marks. Nevertheless, he cheated on his income tax (which was pitifully low at the time), failing to report 90,000 marks annually. He had the government build roads near his estates to lower his cost of shipping timber. He tailored the timber and distillery taxes to meet his particular needs and waged a private war with insurance companies because he considered his own rates too high. Pflanze’s recent biography confirms Stern’s earlier portrait. When he required a doctor’s services regularly, Bismarck had his physician appointed a professor of medicine in Berlin despite the unanimously negative vote of the faculty. It is a rather original way to cut one’s medical bills, and one not open to most of us.\textsuperscript{19} Of course, he used insider information in buying and selling shares; something that was probably universal among political leaders. Still, one is surprised to learn that he speculated on his own dismissal by dumping his German investments to buy Egyptian ones in the late winter of 1890.

What also emerges from a look at the private Bismarck is his capacity to hate. One already knew of his boundless contempt for Windthorst, Lasker, and Harry von Arnim, but it is sobering to see this passion directed at his son, Herbert, who contemplated marrying a woman from a liberal family. Stern’s detailed account of this episode, full of threats, bullying, and manipulation, presents a grim portrait of Bismarck’s ferocity when his will was challenged by anyone in a dependent position. There may have been more than one reason why earlier biographers, most of whom were Bismarck enthusiasts, avoided the private realm.

\textsuperscript{18}See, for instance, Taylor’s biography and that of C. Grant Robinson, \textit{Bismarck} (New York, 1919), and Erich Eyck, \textit{Bismarck}, 3 vols. (Erlenbach-Zürich, 1941–1947.)

\textsuperscript{19}Pflanze, \textit{Bismarck}, 3:100–3, 186–87, 263–64.
In assessing Bismarck’s political values, Stern builds upon Erich Eyck’s earlier liberal multi-volume biography. The chancellor’s disdain for parliamentary government and its creation, politicians, is manifest. By the way, Bleichröder’s views were not all that different. Occasionally, Bismarck could appreciate his adversaries in foreign affairs, but on the domestic scene he showed neither mercy nor respect for his opponents, including the conservatives in the 1870s. His cynicism about human nature led him to bribe those whose votes he required. When this was not possible, he poured scorn on those who remained true to their principles. Stern writes that his lack of tolerance, his refusal to see liberal leaders as honorable, created a poison in German political life that survived Bismarck. Unlike Pflanze, who views Bismarck as the Franklin Delano Roosevelt of Germany, Stern argues, “he prevented a liberal and humane Germany from arising.” While he does not go as far as those who believe the second empire was created “against the spirit of the times,” Stern does say that the chancellor’s obsession with power was unrestrained by intellect or moral realism. Thus, his desire to maintain a conservative authoritarian political system leads him unsurprisingly in 1890 to recommend another revolution from above.

Stern’s dual biography appeared three years before Gall’s two volumes, and fourteen before the three volumes of Pflanze. Pflanze sees the major dichotomy of Bismarck’s tenure as the split between foreign and domestic policy. In the realm of foreign policy, he is described as providing Prussia and Germany with “nearly three decades of generally expert leadership,” whereas in the domestic realm he is seen as a rigid and unbending servant of Prussian absolutism. Stern saw things somewhat differently, and Gall, quite independently, came to the same conclusion as Stern. While quite critical, Stern does not demonize Bismarck. He is not one of those scholars condemned by Gall for “subscribing to a kind of negative Bismarck worship that purports to be critical but is in fact writing, success story history with

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20 In presenting a liberal analysis of Bismarck’s career, Stern’s chapters on Bismarck are closest to Eyck’s three volumes cited above.

21 Pflanze writes, “Like FDR the American President with whom he [Bismarck] is most comparable, he sought to modify the system in order to save it.” Bismarck, 3:438.
altered value judgments." At times, he describes Bismarck as "brilliant," "incredibly dexterous," and, referring to the 1860s, a man who "acted with extraordinary quickness, flexibility and utterly open-minded realism." Basically, Stern, and Gall after him, see much that is creative in the chancellor's first decade and a half. They do not question the need for a German nation-state as Franz Schnabel did in some of his writings. Stern describes the decade of the liberal seventies as "singularly rich in legislative achievements." In a sense, Stern was ahead of his time in drawing a balanced picture of Bismarck. As the recent publications of Thomas Nipperdey and Hans-Ulrich Wehler show, the pendulum of Bismarck scholarship has been swinging away from the thorough condemnation common in the 1960s and 1970s.

Both Stern and Gall view the late 1870s as a watershed after which German politics moved in a new direction. In the latter part of the 1870s a reaction developed against liberalism in politics, against capitalism in economics, and against the Jews in society. The elites of agriculture and industry came together, and the further evolution of the empire in a more liberal political direction was precluded. Unlike Rosenberg, Stern is dubious whether the "Great Depression" can bear all the responsibility for this turn to the right or the "Second Founding of the Reich," as some have termed it. Both Stern and Gall see the chancellor in his last decade in power as opposed to any political evolution; at times, perversely brilliant in his defense of the status quo; but nevertheless a failure domestically,

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23 In many respects Schnabel has the most unique view of the Bismarck era, because he questions the need for a German nation. In his essay on Eyck's three volumes, he praises Eyck for the first liberal biography of Bismarck but sees his departure from earlier conservative nationalist works as partial, because Eyck shares their belief in the necessity of a unified German state in central Europe. See Schnabel, "The Bismarck Problem," 85. In contrast, Hans Rothfels claimed that Eyck's work "trägt nur zu deutlich den Stempel der Propaganda und der Stimm." Hans Rothfels, *Zeitgeschichtliche Betrachtungen* (Göttingen, 1959), 60.

with little to offer the next generation, neither challenges nor ideals. He had returned to the Bismarck of the later forties, a *verkrampt* conservative. The German revolution was complete, and the future was to be one long Thermidor. One remembers that the young Max Weber in his *Antrittsvortrag* complained of the deification of Bismarck and of his own fear that his generation acted as though all of Germany’s problems had been solved for decades to come.25

A subtext running through *Gold and Iron* is Bismarck’s attitude toward Jews, exemplified by Bleichröder. Stern’s theme is clear: “anti-Semitism was no part of his [Bismarck’s] creed”;26 Bismarck believed that affluence created patriotism—with Jew and gentile alike. Those Jews who did not have a strong stake in society, such as Lasker, would always be critics. Indeed, a convincing case can be made that he viewed Catholics as a much greater threat to his empire than Jews.27 When Bleichröder or other prominent Jews were slandered, Bismarck ignored the criticisms; neither did he break off his relations with those under attack nor did he defend them. He understood that the assaults on his banker were meant for him as well. When the *Kreuzzeitung* termed him a *Judenknecht* in the mid-1870s, he could no longer have any illusions about the price he would have to pay for having a Jewish banker—but, interestingly, he was willing to pay it.

Stern is perturbed that the chancellor would never take a principled stand against anti-Semitism. If his adversaries were Jews, as was the case with Lasker and Bamberger in the 1880s, he might even engage in the use of anti-Semitic epithets to vilify them. He could also defend Jews as he did in regard to Rumania (which was a long way from Berlin) at the Congress of Berlin, where he demanded that

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26 Stern, *Gold and Iron*, 528. At the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Bismarck rejected Russian minister Gorchakov’s anti-Semitic remarks, saying Jewish feelings may have been the result of the many forms of oppression that Jews had faced (p. 377).
27 Historians have, perhaps, been too reductionist in stressing the scope of anti-Semitism in the Bismarckian era. At various times legislation and enforcement limited the rights of Socialists, Poles, and Catholics, but not Jews, who first attained the status of full citizens between 1867 and 1871. To speak of “eliminationist” anti-Semitism in the Second Empire is not convincing.
all Jews born on Rumanian soil gain Rumanian citizenship. But as in the previous case, attacks on or defenses of Jews were tactical, designed to achieve other, more important goals. In the latter case he used his defense of Jews as leverage to force the Rumanian government to pay off German noble investors who had lost their shirt on railway shares. When a debate about Jews in the Landtag in 1880 turned nasty, he would not intervene—most likely because there was nothing to be gained. His response to Adolf Stöcker's demagogic speeches against Jews and Jewish capitalism in the late 1880s was to have him prosecuted under the antisocialist law. Stern sees this as a typical Bismarckian solution; but perhaps the chancellor recognized that, in the atmosphere of the times, any other strategy was hopeless. If I had to characterize Stern's view of Bismarck's behavior on issues relating to Jews, I would use the term disappointing. He did not use his pulpit to educate the nation in matters of anti-Semitism. But it could have been worse given the treatment that Poles, socialists, and clerical Catholics received.

There is one other book in the 1960s that set the agenda for historians of Imperial Germany. That was, of course, Fritz Fischer's book on war aims in the First World War, which raised the issue (implicitly if not explicitly) of continuity in German history. Stern is too subtle and too sophisticated a scholar to make crude comparisons with German leaders of the twentieth century. An unreflective case for continuity is not made. He does not lecture us about a scant decade and a half separating the second from the third Reich. What he does do, and effectively, is to give the reader a sense of portent about what is to follow. William II, Holstein, Waldersee, and Herbert Bismarck appear toward the end of the volume as menacing characters sharing vices as troubling as those of Bismarck senior but gravely lacking in his virtues. The men in the wings are arrogant, intolerant, and devoid of tact. It is William who views Bleichröder's support for a continued relationship with Russia as tantamount to treason and who, according to Stern, makes the decision to sack Bismarck over his close relationship with his Jewish banker. The difference between the two generations is best represented by a phrase that Bismarck wrote in the margins of a letter from his son to Philipp zu Eulen-

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berg. “For years,” Herbert wrote, “I would have liked Papa to have dismissed this dangerous Jew as his banker, he is too inconsiderate, a liar; when this money-grubbing Semite can earn a few millions, then he could not care less what happens to Papa or the Fatherland.” Seeing this letter, the elder Bismarck laconically scribbled two words in the margins, “Who would?” At once he showed his enlightened belief in the universality of human nature and his all-embracing cynicism. In 1893, three years after his resignation and the year of the founding of the Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens, Bleichröder died, and Bismarck, still being assaulted about his Jewish banker, defended him to a journalist as a superb businessman and a man of great refinement. Thus, Stern is cautious. Having earlier argued that Bismarck had poisoned the atmosphere of German politics, he is only willing to see this poison as toxic for one generation.

Stern’s portrait of Bismarck is of a complex hybrid; it is filled with nuance and subtlety. Bismarck comes across as a protean individual, a towering figure, but one whose failures were as numerous as his successes. We see the private man as well as the public man. We learn that economics was intertwined with politics and, on occasion, with diplomacy as in the wars of the 1860s. Earlier I said a profile may result in a sharper image than an attempt at a complete picture. Indeed, this is what happens in Gold and Iron. Scholars concerned with Bismarck should rejoice at Stern’s decision to write a dual biography.

Memoirs
Marion Dönhoff, Ralf Dahrendorf, Bill Bradley

Richard Holbrooke, Marion Dönhoff, Fritz Stern
I very much regret not being present at this gathering in honor of an old friend who is also a former student; and I am grateful to the sponsors for letting me voice by proxy my congratulations and my tribute.

You are all so well aware of Professor Stern's superb career as scholar, teacher, university administrator, mentor of ambassadors, and oracle to the statesmen of modern Germany that it would be idle to give details of these accomplishments. Instead, let me draw on memories to make a point or two about our friend's character.

Fritz, in spite of all he has achieved, remains the modest fellow he was when a student. I remember an occasion of his undergraduate years that is typical. He was competing for a medal endowed by an ancient alumnus for an oration on a patriotic subject. Fritz had the good judgment to interpret "patriotic" in a broad sense, and he delivered an excellent talk. The other two judges and I were unanimous that he should have the prize. But when we told him, his amazement was remarkable. "Really?" he said, "Me? The medal?" It was only our faculty status that kept him from blurting out: "Are you kidding?"

At a later stage a more complex characteristic came into view. Fritz was a graduate student, and I had the privilege of sponsoring his dissertation. It turned out to be a first-rate book, as I need hardly say, and with a splendid title: The Politics of Cultural Despair. (I often think it would fit the present situation on some campuses.)

In that far-off day, Fritz's work was in typescript, and five copies had been distributed to the examiners. What happened next shows that Fritz had the scholar's sensitive conscience, coupled with the willingness of the genius to profit by crime. He was then teaching at Cornell. I was reading his text at Columbia when the phone rang. It was Fritz, sounding troubled. He had found on page 131 a statement
that was misleading. He had revised the page and had the five sheets ready to replace the error. What should he do?

At first I suggested waiting until the day of the exam. But we soon agreed that it would be confusing and would make a bad impression. We decided that he should mail the pages from Ithaca by special delivery and that I would give one to each reader.

But at the end of May—classes being over—professors are hard to find. I got hold of one, explained the situation, and gave him his page. That left three on my hands with no takers. I had no choice: I must burgle the offices of the absentees with the janitor’s passkey, find Fritz’s dissertation, and insert the page where it belonged.

I remember trying to think of what to say if I was caught at the job. The truth seemed frightfully complicated. Well, I managed to sneak in two of the sheets quite quickly, but in the final office, I could not find Fritz’s box on the shelf where four or five other scripts were stacked. I was about to give up when I looked at the desk. There it was, in two thick piles; the wretched man had read about half of it. But Providence was on Fritz’s side. Page 131 came just a little beyond the point where the reader had stopped.

There must be a moral to this tale. I believe it is that Fritz has never abused the gifts of fortune. He benefited that one time. For everything since, the credit is his alone.

January 30, 1996
Fritz Stern and I got to know each other first as assistant professors at Columbia University. He was in the history department; I was in economics, although I was a historian by training and predilection. We hit it off right away and taught a seminar together, which consisted of dialogues between the two of us, as well as between the students and ourselves, and among the students. We didn’t always agree.

I cannot remember how I first came to know Mr. Frederick Brunner. I think I approached him because I learned that he held the personal archive (Nachlaß) of Gerson Bleichröder, long head of the Berlin merchant bank S. Bleichröder. Brunner was a partner in the successor firm of Arnhold and S. Bleichröder. He and his associates had seen the firm taken over by an “Aryan” banking house, Hardy and Co.; they had seen the writing on the wall and fled Germany ahead of the catastrophe. Brunner was a paragon of German correctness and formality. I must have seemed to him a characteristically casual American academic. But we hit it off, and instead of simply letting me into the papers, he persuaded me to turn them into a history of the bank.

Now I was in trouble, because I quickly realized that I did not know enough German history to do justice to the subject. (French history was my specialty.) But there was Fritz Stern, just the person I needed. I somehow talked Fritz into joining me in writing a rounded history of the bank, not only as a financial institution but as a piece of German history. He had his reservations, thinking at first that this would not amount to much. But in the event, he proved more committed to the project than I.

From the beginning, we were going to do the research and writing together, dividing the responsibility by topic. The first big step was that we arranged to go together to the Center for Advanced
Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford in 1957–58, in order to work free of teaching duties and other distractions. The Center was then, as it is now, something of a paradise for scholars, but only more so, primarily because it was just beginning and had a huge pool of established talent to draw on. In economics, for example, the group included four future Nobel prize winners: Ken Arrow, Milton Friedman, George Stigler, Bob Solow. Fritz and I, along with Ralf Dahrendorf, Bob Solow, and some others, were the fledglings. We learned much and came to see history through a wider prism.

Later, Fritz and I arranged to go together to France in 1962–63, among other things to work in the archives of the Paris Rothschilds. From the banking history point of view, these records were crucial. The key to Bleichröders’ success was its tie to Rothschilds, and through it to Bismarck, and the two firms corresponded several times a day. To the best of our knowledge, the only Rothschild records to survive the war were those of the Paris and London branches. Paris, miraculously, let us in, free and unsupervised, and even consented to our photocopying the material. London, whom I approached later, were, on the contrary, icily unwelcoming. But that is another story. We came, no doubt, a little too early. Some years later, they began opening up, though not to us (we never went back). There remain immense treasures to be exploited, in both places.

This trip to France was also the occasion for side trips to Germany, Hungary, and (for me) Romania. We worked in the state archives in Potsdam and in the Prussian archives in Merseburg. In those days, a trip to these places was a voyage back in time. The debris had been cleared, but the streets, even the main streets, were empty of vehicles (though traffic lights were working, and if, like a typically undisciplined American jaywalker, you tried to cross against the light, all the other pedestrians called out to warn and scold). The restaurants were a scene of silent warfare between waiters and diners (unless you were fortunate enough to gain admission to the Gäste­haus der Regierung). And you might be assigned to a private house, as we were in Potsdam, where the hostess provided a very small bowl of hot water for shaving (but only after being asked) and then reduced it to half a bowl when we showed we could shave with less. We should have emptied the bowl.
Withal, the archives were an oasis of professional competence and devotion, and we got whatever papers we asked for.

The stay in Paris cemented the ties between the Stern and Landes families. We lived a few blocks apart, and Cathie Stern went to elementary school with Alison Landes. The girls would pick up bread for lunch on the way home, then break the loaf in the middle and nibble on it, with a view to concealing their depredations. Peggy and Sonia were great buddies and have remained so ever since.

I could go on and probably should, if only by way of preserving memories. Let me say now, though, that in spite of all this travel together and side-by-side note taking, Fritz and I were on different tracks. I got ambushed by an invitation to contribute a chapter to the *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, which grew to the length of a short book and then, enlarged, came out as a full-scale book, *The Unbound Prometheus*. Fritz kept working on Bleichröder. And, finally, I had to recognize that I was falling farther and farther behind, and that it would be unfair to ask him to wait for me. So we parted ways, and he went on to write *Gold and Iron*, a great book that built on the Bleichröder Nachlaß to present a larger picture of Bismarckian Germany from a new perspective. And I am left with a drawer full of manuscript that takes the story of the bank up to about 1848. But I learned a great deal in writing this and, in particular, I had the pleasure and profit of working together with a good friend and a great historian.
I want to salute Fritz Stern today as a scholar and friend of thirty years' standing, but also as a member of a secret society: a band of hardy mountain pedestrians who form the latest kind of Marian cult. This one is the cult of Sils Maria, in which a number of us become entirely besotted and incapable of doing other than enter a trance which impels us immediately outwards and upwards, searching for yellow signs and green benches. Some of us have been known to be rooted to the spot at the sight of green benches in quite other places, but Fritz is not one of them.

No, Fritz has a high standing in this cult related to the fact that more than one of his pillars of scholarship helps hold up the roof of one of the most beautiful libraries in the world, the local library, the Bibliotheka Engadiniensa. There, browsing one day, I came across a book, parts of which were written in Sils by an obscure philosopher. I pondered on the shimmering qualities of a phrase and thought it might be interesting to the company this evening. It goes, with some minor editorial changes: “When you look into Sils Maria, Sils Maria looks into you.”

In the case of Fritz Stern, what does Sils see? Once more the riches of the library, with the heavenly smell of pine and a window encompassing all the Chaste, may lend some clues. A recent find there has discerning deconstructionists hard at work trying to decode the following poem, written in Romanesh and filled with strange writing that I may (indeed will) misinterpret. Do forgive me if the text is somewhat flawed. But it goes something like this:

At age 12, a strong youth from Breslau
Announced he was leaving the house;
“To Caldicote, I am determined,
where Hitler is seen as a louse!”
And so to the edges of Cambridge
The family came with a thud;
For trailing behind them in curtains
Was furniture covered in mud.

After scrubbing and wiping and wailing
Only one thing remained to be done
To leave for New York and entrust them
To uncle and old Fitzwilliam.

So to Columbia the furniture wandered
And sat while students filed past
The office of teacher and provost
Whose mark on his students did last.

When the office and home were untended
The chairs did come and discourse
About Bethmann and old friend Bleichröder
And Alexis de Tocqueville, of course.

About temptations illiberals offer
Which Fritz has skewered with prose
Both withering and full of passion
All intolerance he does oppose.

There is unity in the transition
From Breslau to Pour le mérite
It is the search for that elusive notion
Of a Europe that’s still incomplete

Of the Europe of Einstein and Rilke
Of Ehrlich, Jaures and Rolland
Of dreamers and men of science
Of Weizmann and Rothschild and sons.
Then the furniture hatched a nice notion
To work an alchemical gem
And transform all into motion
And spawn their own progeny then;

So out of the bowels of Manhattan
Came forms of wood none saw before
There were rectangles, pillars and shingles
And strange writing both aft and fore.

They flew with dispatch to old Zurich
And took the train southward and west
To stand guard on the slopes of Maria
Called Sils by the walkers who jest

That every sign saying one hour
Between point A and point B
Can be treated as gold and as iron
As certain as certain can be.

The wood signs came sharp into focus
And bore the most odd epithets.
They said: “Marmore,” “Fex,” and “Isola”
And “Fuorcla Surlej” and “Corvatch”

And “Muottas Muragl” was yonder
“To Pontresina” others did say
But the finest of all was uncovered
At the end of a wonderful day

It said:
Thanks to you Fritz for your smile
For your wisdom and culture and fun
But above all thanks for your friendship
May the years reward all you have done.

Washington, D.C.
April 1996
Lessons from the Life and Work of Fritz Stern

*Helmut Schmidt*

“I come from a Germany that no longer exists and will never exist again. In the autumn of 1938—I was twelve—my parents and I left our old ‘Heimat’ of Breslau, not voluntarily, but by force and at the last minute,” said the German-American Jew Fritz Stern retrospectively in his much-celebrated address to the German Bundestag in Bonn on the occasion of the Day of German Unity, June 17, 1987. On that day, the history professor from Columbia University in New York warned Germans not to succumb to a national arrogance: The Federal Republic must “never forget that it is, in a certain sense, condemned to being a sort of model for promoting freedom, in order to preserve itself, to honor the victims of the past, and to give hope to the people of the other Germany.” Later, following German reunification, he cautioned firmly against gambling with the “second chance” granted Germany and Europe in a bloody century, which included the catastrophes of the Second and Third Reichs that Germany brought upon itself.

The achievements and creativity of the historian Fritz Stern rest on two pillars. On the one hand, there is this body of extraordinary scientific work, the value of which has been honored in detail by other colleagues in the field. I myself can only add that his analyses have contributed immensely to our understanding of the history of power struggles throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as their impact on politics today, and how ideas change and parallel each other. Viewed from a distance, from the more humane America, the descendent of a liberal Jewish family of scholars from Germany depicted German history *sine ira et studio*—never bitter, always differentiated; although persecuted by Hitler, he remained dedicated to explaining the inhumane and incomprehensible. In the
classic *The Politics of Cultural Despair*—to name just one work—Stern examined thoroughly the role played by cultural pessimism as an ideological precursor of the Third Reich.

*Gold and Iron*, an excellent psychological study of Bismarck and the financier of his wars, the Jewish banker Gerson Bleichröder, shed new light on the schizophrenic nature of German-Jewish relations against the backdrop of growing anti-Semitism in the age of the empire's founding in 1871.

His biographies of Fritz Haber, Albert Einstein, or Ernst Reuter are psycho-political studies that make intriguing reading. One of the pleasures of reading his books is that Stern incorporates in all of his numerous, meticulous studies the special quality of American historiography; namely, precision as a tribute to science, and vividness as a tribute to the reader.

On the other hand, Professor Fritz Stern, a member of the order Pour le Mérite, is a *homo politicus* who debates inquisitively, argues artfully, tells anecdotes playfully, who is buoyed by the American optimistic spirit of "Let's do it," and who can always be counted on to come up with unconventional suggestions. Therefore, as a member of the Senate of the Deutsche Nationalstiftung, he is forever enriching any discussion that has become mired.

Stern advises the American government and reminds Germans of repressed truths—of the strife between East and West rooted in the lack of psychological understanding of one another, whereby the West has since forgotten that the East liberated itself; of the despondency that gnaws away at the potential enrichment of unification, much to Stern's surprise; of the danger inherent in nostalgia of any sort; of the necessity for a reinvigorated Germany to give its Eastern neighbors a sense of security—even if it is in the midst of an internal crisis; of the historical achievement of the fifty-year-old cooperation between Germany and America. He is aware of the "burden resting upon the German nation: Its complicated and compromised past exerts an incredible presence in the world of today.” He is confident, but he also sees the dangers.

Because "persecution and loss, the sense of happiness and guilt over having survived accidentally are no stranger" to him, he worries.

We Germans are indebted to this important scholar. We continue to count on his contributions to solving the challenges facing Ger-
many. More than ever before, we need the wise advice of this inter-
mediary between America and Europe, between history and politics,
between thinkers and doers—and his justified warnings about per-
petual German "dreams and delusions" and their consequences.

On February 2, 1996, this amazing man with the lively spirit, my
friend Fritz Stern, turned seventy. Congratulations!
"Die ruhlosen Deutschen":
Fritz Stern zum 70. Geburtstag

Marion Gräfin Dönhoff

Ich bin seit über dreißig Jahren mit Fritz Stern befreundet, aber schon bevor ich ihn kennenlernte, habe ich alles, was er über den Verlauf und die politische Ideengeschichte Deutschlands schrieb, verschlungen. Für mich ist er ein so faszinierender Historiker, weil er nicht nur die ökonomischen Zusammenhänge und historischen Gegebenheiten darstellt, sondern stets auch die kulturellen Wurzeln erforscht und Biographien der Persönlichkeiten schildert, die die jeweilige Zeit geprägt haben.

Wir waren im vorigen Jahr beide auf einer deutsch-polnischen Tagung, die dem Thema "Verlorene Heimat" gewidmet war. Am Schluß seines einführenden Vortrags berichtete er von einem Besuch in seiner Heimatstadt Breslau, die er als zwölfjähriger Junge hatte verlassen müssen.


Vielleicht hat uns—Fritz und mich—der Verlust der Heimat noch zusätzlich verbunden. Auch ich war, ein paar Jahre später als er, zum erstenmal wieder in der Heimat, im nördlichen Teil Ostpreußens, der heute russisch ist. Groß war meine Erleichterung, daß die alte Lindeallee, die 1740 von einem Vorfahren angelegt worden ist, noch
steht, auch der See vor dem Schloß war so schön wie eh und je—aber von dem Schloß selbst ist nichts übriggeblieben, nicht einmal Schutt und Geröll: ein großes Schloß, mit allen Kunstsammlungen, dem Archiv, den Gobelins, Bildern und Silber, einfach verschwunden, erst ausgebrannt und dann gesprengt.


Hitler wurde von den einfachen Leuten wirklich als Erlöser religiös verehrt. Ich habe manchmal zu Hause in Ostpreußen bei der örtlichen Verwaltung die Briefe eingesehen, die ihm die Leute schrie­ben und die die Reichskanzlei dann zur Stellungnahme in das Dorf zurückschickte. Sie waren stets im religiösen Duktus geschrieben: Du, der Du unsere Not kennst ... Du, der allein uns helfen kann ... Die Nazis hatten die Fähigkeit, wie Fritz sagt, Politik in ein perma­nentes Weihespiel zu verwandeln und die Menschen in ständigen Rausch zu versetzen.

Lieber Fritz, wir haben Dir viel, sehr viel zu verdanken.
Curriculum Vitae

Fritz Stern, born February 2, 1926, Breslau

EDUCATION

B.A. (Phi Beta Kappa), Columbia College, 1946
M.A., Columbia University, 1948
Ph.D., Columbia University, 1953

TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS

1946–48    Lecturer, Columbia University
1949–51    Instructor, Columbia University
1951–53    Acting Assistant Professor of History, Cornell University
1953–57    Assistant Professor of History, Columbia University
1957–63    Associate Professor of History, Columbia University
1963–67    Professor of History, Columbia University
1967–92    Seth Low Professor of History, Columbia University
1980–83    Provost of the University, Columbia University
1987–88    Acting Provost, Columbia University
1992–      University Professor, Columbia University

Guest and visiting professorships:
1967–      Permanent Visiting Professor, University of Constance
Spring 1979 Elie Halévy Visiting Professor, Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris
June 1995  Guest Professor, Ludwig Maximilians University, Munich

Also taught at Yale University and the Free University of Berlin

1993–1994 Senior Advisor to the U.S. Embassy in Bonn
1994–      Consultant to the U.S. Embassy in Bonn
PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Book Review editor, *Foreign Affairs* (for Western Europe), 1962–95
Consultant, U.S. Department of State, 1966–67
Member, OECD Examination Panel for West German Education, 1971–72
Member, Visiting Board, Dept. of German, Princeton University, 1972–91
International Affairs Committee, American Historical Association, 1972–75
Phi Beta Kappa Senator, 1973–80
Member, Board of Editors, *American Historical Review*, 1974–77
Member, Editorial Board, *Foreign Affairs*, 1978–1992
Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar, 1979–80
Member, Board of Trustees, The German Marshall Fund, 1981–
Fellow, The Leo Baeck Institute, 1982–
Member, Visiting Committee, Graduate Faculties, The New School for Social Research, 1983–
Member, Board of Trustees, Aspen Institute Berlin, 1983
Member, Trilateral Commission, 1983–1990
Member, Committee on Membership, Council on Foreign Relations, 1984–85
Member, Editorial Committee, The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein, 1984–
Member, Academic Advisory Board, Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna, 1987–; Vice-Chairman since 1994
Member, Academic Council, Institute for Advanced Study in Berlin, 1987–1993
Member, Board of Advisors, *Transit. Europäische Revue*, 1990–
Member, Board of Sponsors, *The American Prospect*, 1990–
Member, Fellows Selection Committee, National Humanities Center, 1990–91
Member, Fellows Selection Committee, Woodrow Wilson Center, 1991–92
Member, Helsinki Watch, 1992–
Member, Advisory Board, Einstein Forum (Potsdam), 1992–
Member, Scientific Committee, Centre de Recherche de l'Historial de la Grande Guerre, 1992–
Member, Committee of Editorial Advisors, Leo Baeck Year Book (London), 1992–
Member, Senate, Deutsche Nationalstiftung (Weimar), 1993–
Member, German–American Academic Council, 1993–
Member, International Advisory Council, International Center for Migration, Ethnicity and Citizenship at the New School for Social Research, 1996–

HONORS
Fellow, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1969
Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit, Federal Republic of Germany, December 1976
Lionel Trilling Book Award, 1977
Great Teachers Award by the Society of Older Graduates of Columbia University, January 1978
Delivered University Lecture at Columbia University, "Einstein's Germany," November 13, 1978
Dr. Leopold Lucas Prize of the Evangelical–Theological Faculty of the University of Tübingen: "In recognition of his fundamental works in modern German history and, in particular, of Gold and Iron: Bismarck, Bleichröder and the Building of the German Empire," 1984
D.L.H. (Honorary Degree), Oxford University, 1985
Address to the Parliament of the Federal Republic of Germany, June 17, 1987
Member, American Philosophical Society, 1988
Award of Excellence, Alumni Association of Graduate Faculties, Columbia University, 1989
Delivered the second annual Isaiah Berlin Lecture at Wolfson College, Oxford, December 3, 1992
Tanner Lecturer, Yale University, March 1993
Second Carl Schurz Lecturer, Library of Congress, April 1993
Elected Member: Orden Pour le Mérite, Federal Republic of Germany, 1994
Corresponding Member (außerordentliches Mitglied), Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1994
35th Annual Mark van Doren Award (by the students of Columbia College) to a teacher “in recognition of his intellectual vigor, generosity of spirit, and contribution to the college community,” April 1996
Kulturpreis Schlesien, 1996

FELLOWSHIPS
Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford, 1957–58
Social Science Research Council, 1960–61
American Council of Learned Societies, 1966–67
John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, 1969–70
Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study, 1972–73
Ford Foundation, 1976–77
Grant, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, 1985, 1988
Visiting Scholar, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, Fall 1989 and Spring 1993
Select Bibliography

BOOKS


**ARTICLES**

Articles collected in *The Failure of Illiberalism* and *Dreams and Delusions* are not listed here.


REVIEWS

Reviews in the following journals:

American Historical Review
BBC
Commentary
Encounter
Foreign Affairs
Historische Zeitschrift
Journal of Modern History
Nature

The New Leader
The New Republic
New York Review of Books
New York Times Book Review
Political Science Quarterly
Saturday Review
Süddeutsche Zeitung
Die Zeit
GHI Publications

PUBLICATIONS OF THE GERMAN HISTORICAL INSTITUTE, WASHINGTON, D.C. (WITH CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS). Currently edited by Detlef Junker with the assistance of Daniel S. Mattern:


Copies are available for purchase from Cambridge University Press, 40 West 20th Street, New York, New York 10011-0495. Phone orders: 1-800-431-1580.
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IN-HOUSE PUBLICATIONS

The following publications are available from the Institute:

BULLETIN    Published in the spring and the fall beginning in 1987.

ANNUAL LECTURE SERIES


Note: The Annual Lectures will be published hereafter as part of the Occasional Papers series.
OCCASIONAL PAPERS

No. 1: *Forty Years of the Grundgesetz (Basic Law)*, with contributions by Peter Graf Kielmansegg and Gordon A. Craig Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute, 1990.


**REFERENCE GUIDES**


